

THIS MONTH

If you're in the market for an ultra-portable laptop, we've got our hands on Asus's improved Eee PC 900 (reviewed on page 20), which runs Windows XP for just £329, as well as Lenovo's ThinkPad X300 (right), which has a 64GB solid-state hard disk and is one of the best lightweight laptops we've seen, albeit at a price.

It's rare to see a new digital camera manufacturer, but we've got one with this month's General Electric's E840s. Turn to page 40 to find out how it fares.

When it comes to printing your photos, Canon's new Pixma iP100 (reviewed on page 34) could be the answer. It's a portable printer that's capable of producing great photographs while on the move, but can also print on plain A4 paper.

Keeping an eye on your home while you're out and about is even easier now thanks to Myhome247. Its Starter Kit (reviewed on page 44) lets you watch live video from a web browser or even a mobile phone.

Jim Martin
Deputy Editor

jim@computershopper.co.uk



LENOVO ThinkPad X300

★★★

£1,950 inc VAT

From www.morecomputers.co.uk

There's been a raft of laptops claiming to be the world's smallest or lightest recently, and the ThinkPad X300 is the latest to join the party. Lenovo claims that it's the thinnest 13.3in widescreen laptop available but, while it isn't quite as slim or elegant as Apple's MacBook Air, at 24mm it's the thinnest 13in laptop we've seen with a built-in optical drive.

You may be wondering why the X300 is so expensive. The main reason is the solid-state hard disk, which costs several hundred pounds. Its 64GB capacity, however, is only just over half that of Toshiba's R500-11B (see 'Also consider...', page 23), which costs just £1,095 including VAT.

The R500 is also around 350g lighter than the X300, but has a smaller, lower-resolution 12in screen and feels a lot flimsier than the ThinkPad. The X300's great build quality is down to a mixture of carbon-fibre and glass-fibre construction. The screen still flexes a little, but the display didn't ripple when twisted, showing that it should withstand life on the go.

Being wider than the R500 gives the X300 extra space for a keyboard, and we were happy to find that it was up to the usual excellent ThinkPad standard. Keys are the same size as a PC keyboard and layout is excellent. Our only gripe is that the Ctrl key has been moved to accommodate the Fn key. It's good to see both a touch pad and a touch stick, as you can use whichever input device you prefer.

The 13.3in screen is a first for a laptop and has an ideal resolution of 1,440x900, which gives considerably more working space than a 1,024x768 or 1,280x800 screen. It has great contrast and the LED backlight is bright and even. Viewing angles are a little limited, but as long as you use it face on, it's not a problem.

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Samsung R70 ★★★★★	HP Photosmart C8180 ★★★★★		Ricoh R8 ★★★★★		
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Archos 405 ★★★★★	LG 37LC550 ★★★★★		Myhome247 Starter Kit ★★★★★		
HTC Touch Cruise ★★★★★	LG Flatron L204WS ★★★★★		Netgear EVA8000 ★★★★★		
Palm Treo 500v ★★★★★	LG Flatron L227WT ★★★★★		Sling Media Slingbox Pro ★★★★★		
SPB Mobile Shell 2.0 ★★★★★	Optoma EP727 ★★★★★		Terratec Cinergy DT USB XS Diversity ★★★★★		
TomTom Go 720 ★★★★★	Panasonic PT-AX200E ★★★★★		TopUp TV TUTV Anytime DTR ★★★★★		
	Philips 32PFL9632D ★★★★★				
	ViewSonic VX2435wm ★★★★★				



The X300 is designed purely with mobile professionals in mind, so it's no surprise to see a fingerprint scanner paired with a TPM 1.2 module to keep your data private. There's also a built-in HSDPA modem for fast mobile broadband. When you're near a hotspot you can switch to the 802.11a/g/Draft-N WiFi, and there's Bluetooth capability, too. The 1.3-megapixel webcam may also prove useful, but the trio of USB2 ports and a VGA output will probably be more important to most users.

The standard three-cell battery lasted for almost five hours in our light-use test. The solid-state disk certainly plays a part in this, but Lenovo's Battery Stretch feature also turns off components such as the DVD writer, wireless radios and sound to increase battery life. You can work away from the mains for longer by replacing the DVD writer

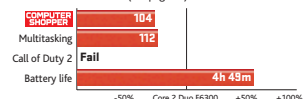
with a secondary battery for £98 including VAT. A six-cell battery for the main compartment that costs £119 including VAT is also available.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lightweight; solid-state hard disk
- ✓ Good battery life
- ✗ Very expensive

ULTRA-PORTABLE LAPTOP 1.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo SL7100, 2GB RAM, 64GB solid-state disk, Intel GMA X3100 graphics, DVD+/-RW, 13.3in widescreen LCD, internal HSDPA modem, Windows Vista Business, three years RTB warranty, 317x236x24mm, 1.45kg
POWER CONSUMPTION 3W standby, 20W idle, 28W active
PART CODE N1215UK
DETAILS www.lenovo.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 64)



Another reason that the standard battery lasts so long is the low-voltage Core 2 Duo SL7100 processor. This means the X300 isn't a great performer: it managed only 104 in our benchmarks, despite the generous 2GB of RAM. It's still more than fast enough for Microsoft Office and web browsing, though.

Overall, we like Lenovo's X300 – it's one of the most usable ultra-portable laptops around – but the premium for the low-capacity solid-state hard disk is too high. Standard hard disk-based models will be available soon at much lower prices, so if you don't need a solid-state disk, these models will be well worth waiting for.

Jim Martin

PC SYSTEMS & LAPTOPS

FAQ

Q How can I recharge my laptop and other gadgets while travelling abroad?

A Depending on your destination, mains electricity will operate at either 220-240 volts or 110-120 volts. You can find out which country uses which voltage at www.kropla.com/electric2.htm.

Most laptops and other portable gadgets manufactured in the past few years will work at either voltage. If in doubt, check the label on your gadget's power supply or consult the manufacturer.

Some older devices may not be able to operate at the lower 110-120V, in which case you'll need a step-down transformer. These are available from www.amazon.co.uk for around £20.

An illustrated guide to the different plugs used in different countries can be found at www.kropla.com/electric.htm. Plug adaptors are available from www.maplin.co.uk for around £5.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

alan@computershopper.co.uk



Audio page 46

Apple iPod Nano	★★★★★
Denon ASD-3W	★★★★
Hercules DJ Console RMX	★★★★★
iRhythms A-211	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
Logitech Z Cinema 2.1	★★★★
Philips SHE2550 Extra Bass	★★★★★
Sandisk Sansa e280	★★★★★
Shure SE210	★★★★★

Networks page 48

Buffalo WBM-R-G125	★★★★★
D-Link DHP-301	★★★★★
Linksys PVC2300-EU	★★★★★
Linksys WAG325 Wireless-N ADSL Gateway	★★★★★
TPC SMC7904W/BRA-N bundle	★★★★
TP Link TL-WR941D	★★★★★

Storage page 50

Corsair Flash Voyager 4GB	★★★★★
Hitachi Deskstar 7K1000 HDS721075KLA330	★★★★★
Hitachi Travelstar 5K500	★★★★
Iomega eGo USB 250GB	★★★★★
Iomega Portable Hard Drive 320GB	★★★★
LaCie 30GB Little Disk	★★★★
LG GGW-H20L	★★★★★
LG CSA-E50N	★★★★★
Pioneer DVR-215	★★★★★
Synology Disk Station DS508	★★★★★
Western Digital Caviar SE16 500GB	★★★★★
Western Digital Scorpio 250GB	★★★★★

Components page 54

AMD Phenom 9850 X4 Black Edition	★★★★★
Cigabyte GA-MA78GM-S2H	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E8400	★★★★★
MSI 9800 GTX-T2D512	★★★★
Silverstone Sugo SST-SG02-F	★★★★★

Software & Games page 56

Adobe Creative Suite 3 Design Premium	★★★★★
Audiosurf	★★★★★
Avanquest Perfect Image 11 Backup & Protect	★★★★★
Code Sector Teracopy	★★★★★
Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	★★★★
Corel CorelDraw Graphics Suite X4	★★★★★
CyberLink MediaShow 4	★★★★★
eJay DJ Mixstation 4	★★★★★
Google Picasa 2.7	★★★★★
Kaspersky Internet Security 7.0	★★★★★
Macrium Reflect 4.2	★★★★★
Namo WebEditor 2006	★★★★★
OpenOffice OpenOffice.org 2.1	★★★★★
Paragon Hard Disk Manager 2008 Suite	★★★★★
Rainbow Six Vegas 2	★★★★★
Roxio Easy Media Creator Suite 10	★★★★★
Vuzix VR920	★★★★★
Ascii Express WebGuide 4	★★★★★

BYTE SIZE

AUTOSAFE CubeByte

★★★★

£23 inc VAT
From www.amazon.co.uk



The CubeByte is a laptop security cable that claims to have an unpickable lock and to be the only lock to adjust to the depth of your laptop's security slot. Two keys are provided. Oddly, the key stays in the lock when you remove it from the laptop, so you can't keep it on a keyring.

The lock works by extending two bars into the slot to prevent it from being pulled out. This mechanism is only as effective as your laptop's security slot as their sizes vary considerably. It's relatively easy to break the lock out of some laptops just by pulling the laptop away, albeit with the risk of damaging the laptop.

Ultimately, the CubeByte is merely a deterrent, and a fairly expensive one at that.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.cubebyte.com

KENSINGTON Contour Balance Notebook Backpack



★★★

£33 inc VAT
From www.kikatek.com

Kensington's latest backpack is supposed to be more comfortable for women to carry than other laptop backpacks. Most of *Shopper's* female staff weren't convinced, though. A common complaint was that the straps felt too thin and insubstantial.

The Contour's chocolate-coloured design is distinctive, but it's an acquired taste. It can accommodate only laptops with 14in screens or smaller, and it's not roomy enough for use as an overnight bag. The laptop compartment isn't very well padded, but there are pockets for accessories.

Although a laptop bag designed for feminine comfort is an intriguing idea, we can't recommend the Contour.

Alan Lu

DETAILS <http://us.kensington.com>

ASUS

Eee PC 900

★★★★★

COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BEST BUY

£329 inc VAT
From www.play.com

The Eee PC 701 (see 'Also consider...', below) caused a storm when it launched last year, and understandably so. It was the first truly affordable ultra-portable laptop, but it had its flaws.

Asus has addressed most of these with the brand new Eee PC 900. Notably, the larger 8.9in screen has a more usable resolution of 1,024x600. This means that the bottom of dialog boxes doesn't fall off the bottom of the display. It's well suited to use with Windows XP Home edition, which is pre-installed on this model.

The new screen doesn't affect the Eee PC's dimensions; the speakers that flanked the original 7in screen have simply been relocated to the base. We were pleased with the new screen's brightness and contrast – and the fact that it isn't reflective – but it's very grainy.

Another problem with the Eee PC 701 was the limited amount of storage. The 900 fixes this by bolstering the on-board 4GB of storage with an 8GB solid-state disk in the mini-card slot, bringing the total to 12GB. However, you can still opt for a version with the Xandros Linux operating system which comes with a 16GB solid-state disk for the same price. There's still an SDHC card slot for adding extra storage.

The 701's touchpad was a little on the small side, and the 900 has a larger version. Similar to Apple's MacBook's, the pad recognises two-finger gestures so you can zoom in and out on documents. Those with chubby fingers will still find the keyboard's keys too small for



comfort, though; it's not particularly conducive to touch-typing even for smaller digits.

One area that hasn't been upgraded is the processor. The 900MHz Celeron M is slow by today's standards, but with 1GB of RAM, it's enough to make office applications run quickly, but loading times are a little sluggish. Battery life is also still an issue. The four-cell battery lasted a meagre three hours 20 minutes in our light-use test, less than we'd expect from an ultra-portable. Buying a spare battery puts the price up to the level of fully fledged Windows laptops. There's also still no optical drive.

For anyone wanting a tiny laptop on a budget, the Eee PC 900 is a good choice. It's undoubtedly better than the 701, but the extra cost is only just worth paying.

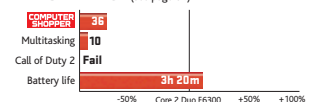
Jim Martin

SUMMARY

- ✓ Enough resolution for Windows
- ✓ Lightweight and small
- ✗ Poor battery life; slow

ULTRA PORTABLE LAPTOP 900MHz Intel Celeron M, 1GB RAM, 4GB + 8GB disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, 8.9in widescreen LCD, 1.3-megapixel webcam, Windows XP Home Edition, two-year warranty, 1kg
POWER CONSUMPTION 5W standby, 13W idle, 16W active
PART CODE EEEPC900-BK007X
DETAILS <http://uk.asus.com>

PERFORMANCE (see page 64)



Also consider...

ASUS

Eee PC 701

★★★★★

COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BEST BUY

£236 inc VAT
From www.cclonline.com

Asus' original Eee PC weighs just 900g and is about the size of a hardback novel. However, various sacrifices have been made to keep the price so low. The 4GB solid-state disk is more robust than a standard hard disk, but there's only 2.5GB free for data. Additional storage can be added by plugging in SD cards.

The keyboard and touch pad are smaller than usual, making typing difficult for big fingers. The 800x480 resolution of the 7in screen feels cramped for tasks such as working on large spreadsheets. Its battery life of two-and-a-half hours is disappointing for an ultra-portable laptop.

The Eee PC uses a customised version of Linux instead of Windows. OpenOffice, Firefox and other



ULTRA PORTABLE LAPTOP Intel Celeron M 900, 512MB RAM, 4GB solid-state disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, 7in widescreen LCD, 900g
PART CODE EEE PC 4G-W
DETAILS <http://eeepc.asus.com/uk>
FULL REVIEW Jun 2008



open-source programs are pre-installed. Using these applications and connecting to a wireless network isn't difficult, although other tasks can be harder when compared with Windows.

Despite its limitations, Asus's Eee PC is an inexpensive laptop for simple office tasks and web browsing.

BELINEA o.max 5 XS

★★★★★

£500 inc VAT

From www.directtvs.co.uk

Belinea may not be a brand you'd associate with PCs or laptops, but the large German company wants to make its name in the UK in this market. The o.max 5 is a remarkably small computer, thinner than a Mac mini and not much deeper. The size is thanks to the use of laptop parts: a Core Duo T2450, 2GB of laptop RAM (which is a lot smaller than desktop PC RAM), a slot-loading DVD writer and a 160GB laptop hard disk. These are all connected to a laptop-style motherboard that has integrated Intel graphics.

At the front, things are kept neat with a power button, an eject button, a USB2 port and a media card reader that supports SD, MMC and Memory Stick Pro cards. Rear ports include three more USB2 ports and a DVI output. If the latter isn't what you need, there are two converters in the box for HDMI and VGA. For audio, you get 3.5mm jacks for microphone and stereo line-out, but the latter doubles as an S/PDIF socket. It's a shame not to see 5.1 analogue outputs, especially for Media Center use.

If you do want to use the o.max 5 as a Media Center PC, it's quiet enough. During testing it was barely audible from 1m, so you shouldn't notice it when watching a DVD or TV shows. Windows Vista Home Premium and a Media Center remote control are bundled, as is a single hybrid TV tuner, so you can opt for analogue or digital broadcasts. Again, it's a shame not to see a second tuner, which would allow you to record two channels at once, or record one and watch another. If you're hooking the o.max



up to an LCD TV, this won't be such an issue, though. Belinea also thoughtfully provides an aerial splitter in the box so you can feed a signal into the o.max 5 and then out to your TV. A mini aerial is also included.

We were particularly pleased that the remote could be used to put the PC to sleep and then wake it up again, rather than having to press the power button on the PC itself – a flaw of other Media Center PCs we've seen. It's also good to see that Belinea has integrated the infrared receiver into the front panel, so there's no need for an unsightly external box.

To connect the o.max to the internet, there's Gigabit Ethernet and WiFi, as well as Bluetooth. The integrated graphics aren't powerful enough for games, or playing high-definition video. This is one of the few notable limitations of the o.max 5. It's worth noting that no keyboard, mouse or monitor are included in the price either.

Whether you're after a small Media Center PC for the living room or an office computer that you can hide away discreetly (Belinea sells a handy bracket that lets you mount it on the back of most LCD monitors), the o.max 5 XS deserves your attention.

Jim Martin

SUMMARY

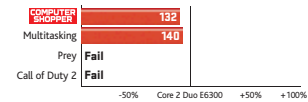
- ✓ Extremely small and very quiet
- ✓ Good value
- ✗ Not powerful enough for HD video

MEDIA CENTER PC 2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T2450, 2GB RAM, 160GB hard disk, Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 950, DVD +/-RW +/-DL, Windows Vista Home Premium, three-year return-to-base warranty

POWER CONSUMPTION 3W standby, 19W idle, 40W active PART CODE 399615

DETAILS www.belinea.com/en

PERFORMANCE (see page 64)



Also consider...

TOSHIBA Portege R500-11B

★★★★★

£1,095 inc VAT

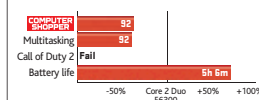
From www.morecomputers.co.uk

Toshiba's R500-11B is a stunning ultra-portable laptop. It has a compelling combination of an extremely thin and light design, long battery life, an outdoor-friendly screen, plentiful storage and connectivity options, plus enough power for business use. Despite its 1.1kg weight, it has a 12in screen and a DVD writer. Build quality, however, isn't up to the standard of the Lenovo ThinkPad X300 (see page 18).

There's also a new model, the R500-126, which ditches the optical drive altogether and replaces the hard disk with a 128GB solid-state disk. It makes for an unbelievably feather-like 780g weight, but it does



ULTRA-PORTABLE LAPTOP Intel Core 2 Duo U7600, 1GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD +/-RW DL, 12in widescreen LCD, 1.1kg PART CODE PPR50E-00L048EN DETAILS www.toshiba.co.uk FULL REVIEW Jun 2008



command an extra £500 premium. Both models are superb examples of ultra-portable laptops, as long as you're careful with them.

BYTE SIZE

LOGITECH diNovo Mini

★★★★★

£73 inc VAT

From www.morecomputers.com

Most people control their media centre PC using a remote control. However, there are often times when you need a keyboard and mouse, such as when browsing the web, installing new hardware or using other applications.

Logitech's diNovo Mini is a great alternative to having a full-size keyboard and mouse stashed next to your sofa. It measures just 152x90x28mm, and has a transparent lid to protect it. Open it up and the backlight is activated, so you can use it in the dark.

Holding it in your palms, you use your thumbs to type. The keys click when pushed, which gives them reasonable feedback. You wouldn't want to type documents on it, but it's great for entering chat messages and search terms.

Beside the keyboard is a small touchpad. This is very sensitive, so you'll need to lower your mouse's sensitivity settings to use it accurately. There's no right-click button; instead, you have to hold down the Function key and press OK.

The touchpad doubles as a joystick, which you can use to navigate Windows Media Center. Sadly, Logitech hasn't included shortcut buttons for common Media Center tasks such as opening the EPG.

The diNovo Mini connects to your PC using Bluetooth 2.0. It comes with a USB Bluetooth receiver, which is stored behind a removable back panel. There's also a switch that lets you choose between PC and PlayStation 3 compatibility. Logitech claims the Li-ion battery will last for around a month between charges.

It's not cheap, but this tiny input device will make a great addition to a media centre PC setup.

Seth Barton

DETAILS www.logitech.com



DELL XPS 630

★★★★

£1,199 inc VAT
From Dell 08444 445818

We reviewed Dell's XPS 420 last month, but while that is marketed as a multimedia PC, the XPS 630 is an out-and-out gaming PC. The black case looks the part, and has four LED lighting zones you can customise using the included utility to create the colours you want. However, considering that the 630 doesn't come with a monitor or any speakers, it has to provide more than a nifty-looking case to justify its high price.

Like the 420, the 630 has a Core 2 Quad Q6600 processor and 2GB of RAM. This pairing performed well in our benchmarks, managing 437 in our video-encoding benchmark. This means it can handle demanding tasks with ease, although not all programs take advantage of the quad-core processor.

The main attraction – for gamers, at least – is the pair of GeForce 8800GT graphics cards configured in SLI mode. Each has a whopping 512MB of RAM, and we saw some blistering results in our Prey and Call of Duty 2 tests. The frame rates were around three times more than you need for smooth gameplay, so the 630 should be able to play the latest 3D games smoothly.

We've been used to Dell making PCs using Intel's BTX form factor, but the 630 uses an ATX design. It's not the standard design, though; the motherboard is mounted upside down and on the opposite side of the case, meaning that expansion cards don't hang upside down as with a normal PC. The 750W power supply is still at the top, however. Overall, the 630 isn't as noisy as Cube 247's Sigma ST13 (reviewed *What's New, Shopper* 244), but it isn't as quiet as the XPS 420.



Unlike other SLI-configured PCs, such as Eclipse's Solar i85n88GT SLI (reviewed on page 85), the 630's twin graphics cards don't block off access to its expansion card slots as they occupy only a single slot each. There are PCI, PCI Express x1 and x4 slots so you can fit peripherals such as a TV tuner. You won't need to add a dedicated sound card, though, as a Creative Sound Blaster X-Fi is already fitted.

For storage, two 500GB hard disks are configured as a RAID 0 array, providing a huge total of 1TB. There's also a DVD writer, a media card reader and Bluetooth, but no WiFi.

The price includes a year of onsite warranty with gaming support, but even with this, we'd expect a PC with these specifications to cost around £850. Proof of this is easily found: CyberPower's Gamer Infinity Crossfire HD (see page 82) was faster in our tests, has an X-Fi sound card and a 22in widescreen monitor, yet costs £300 less.

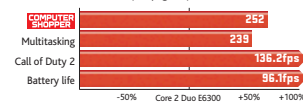
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great performance
- ✗ Poor value
- ✗ Noisier than previous Dell PCs

DESKTOP PC 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Quad Q6600, 2GB RAM, 2x 500GB hard disks, 2x 512MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GTs, DVD +/-RW +/-DL, Windows Vista Home Premium, one year onsite warranty
POWER CONSUMPTION 5W standby, 220W idle, 320W active
PART CODE NPUK5-DRX602
DETAILS www.dell.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 64)



BYTE SIZE

BELKIN Network USB Hub

★★★★★

£58 inc VAT
From www.ebuyer.com

COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BEST BUY

Belkin's Network USB Hub connects to your router via an Ethernet cable and allows you to attach up to five USB devices. This turns them into network devices that can be accessed by any computer on your network. You have to install Belkin's Control Center software on every PC that needs to access the hub.

It worked perfectly over wireless and wired networks. USB storage devices showed up as if they were connected directly to the PC and file transfer worked smoothly. Even over a wireless network connection we could play MP3s from drives attached to the hub, and our PC recognised USB printers immediately.

It's pricy, but the Network USB Hub is worth it if you need to share your devices.

Kat Orphanides

DETAILS www.belkin.co.uk

LINDY USB 2.0 Mirror Hub

★★★★

£13 inc VAT
From www.lindy.co.uk



Most USB hubs are too bulky to carry around with you, but Lindy's bus-powered Mirror Hub is roughly the size of a highlighter pen. Despite this, it still has four ports.

The 10cm integrated USB cable clips to the back of the hub when not in use. Chunky USB devices could block off access to an adjacent port when plugged in.

The Mirror Hub can't be powered from the mains. This is a disadvantage if you use power-hungry peripherals such as portable hard disks. Kensington's four-port USB 2.0 Pocket Hub is almost as small and comes with a mains adaptor but costs just £3 more from www.misco.co.uk.

Alan Lu

DETAILS www.lindy.co.uk

Also consider...

SAMSUNG R70

★★★★★

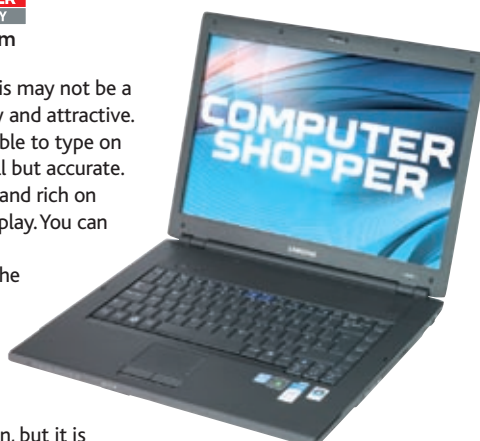
£660 inc VAT
From www.cclonline.com

COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BEST BUY

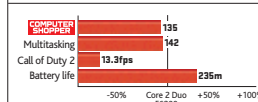
The Samsung R70's chassis may not be a new design, but it's sturdy and attractive. The keyboard is comfortable to type on and the touch pad is small but accurate.

Colours looked bright and rich on the 15.4in widescreen display. You can connect the R70 to a high-definition TV using the HDMI port, and there's plenty of room for your files on the spacious 200GB hard disk.

The R70 isn't the quickest laptop we've seen, but it is fast enough for most tasks and has a generous 2GB of RAM for dealing with memory-intensive tasks such as photo manipulation. The graphics chip isn't powerful enough to play the latest games, but it



GENERAL-PURPOSE NOTEBOOK
Intel Core 2 Duo T5450, 2GB RAM, 200GB disk, Nvidia GeForce 8400M GS graphics, DVD +/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.6kg
PART CODE NP-R70A007/SUK
DETAILS www.samsung.com/uk
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008



doesn't share system memory like integrated graphics chips. It lasted nearly four hours in our battery test, and is excellent value at this price.

BYTE SIZE

DYNAMODE Premium 1.8m HDMI-to- HDMI Cable

★★★★★

£4.39 inc VAT

From www.netbit.biz

COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BUDGET BUY

With digital interfaces such as HDMI, there's little point in spending hundreds of pounds on a cable when a budget version will produce identical image quality. Dynamode knows this and has launched a range of low-cost HDMI cables from 1.8m to 5m in length.

The high-grade copper cables are triple-shielded from electro-magnetic and radio interference and have gold-plated connectors. They're certified for HDMI 1.3 and can handle 1080p video.

We tested the cable with an HD DVD player and a 720p LCD TV, and found that picture quality was exactly the same as the other two HDMI cables we've used. If you need more than 1.8m, the 3m cable is just £5.39 and the 5m cable costs £7.18.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.dynamode.co.uk


MAXELL MIS-1

★★★★★

£59 inc VAT

From www.tonik.co.uk

Maxell's MIS-1 iPod docking station is compact, with a smaller subwoofer than most 2.1 speaker sets and tiny satellites. The subwoofer delivers throbbing bass, while high frequencies are clearly audible from the stereo speakers. Vocals aren't as well defined, giving the sound a slightly brittle quality.

An iPod dock also houses the volume controls, a 3.5mm auxiliary input, an S-video output and a micro-USB port. At normal volumes sound quality isn't bad, but better speakers are available for less.

Kat Orphanides

DETAILS www.maxell.co.uk


ARBICO PX 2140

★★★★★

£350 inc VAT

From Arbico 020 8672 9404

Arbico is a relatively new British PC builder based in London. Its PX 2140 doesn't come with a keyboard, mouse or monitor: it's a base unit designed for those looking to replace their existing computer while keeping their peripherals.

The PX 2140's Intel Pentium Dual Core processor has been overclocked from its usual 1.6GHz to a blistering 2.66GHz. It performed very well in our Windows benchmarks for such an inexpensive PC, scoring a respectable 280 in our video-encoding test. The 2GB of RAM is more than enough for running several programs simultaneously.

We weren't as impressed by the 3D graphics performance. The Radeon HD 3450 graphics card struggled in our Prey and Call of Duty 2 benchmarks, so this PC is best suited to 2D work. The HD 3450 chip is still an improvement over the integrated graphics chips often found in cheap PCs, as it doesn't share system memory and it can be connected to two monitors simultaneously for more working space thanks to its DVI and VGA ports.

Budget computers sometimes lack expansion options, forcing you to replace the entire PC rather than simply adding or replacing components to prolong its usefulness. However, the PX 2140 has two free PCI slots and an empty PCI Express x1 slot for accommodating peripherals such as TV tuners and wireless adaptors.

If the 160GB hard disk isn't big enough for all your files, there's room for an extra six hard disks. There are only three spare SATA



ports, though. There's also a pair of empty 5¼in bays for accommodating another DVD writer or Blu-ray drive. You won't need to add a memory card reader, however, as one is already present.

The PX 2140 is good value, but there are better deals available. For example, Mesh's 6000+ X2 GT (see *Labs*, page 77), performed similarly in our Windows benchmarks but has a more powerful graphics card

that is able to play 3D games, albeit with less detailed graphics settings than the fastest cards available. The 6000+ X2 GT also has a larger hard disk and comes with a cordless keyboard and mouse as well as a 19in widescreen display, yet it costs only £70 more than the PX 2140.

Even if you already have a keyboard, mouse and monitor you're happy with, having two monitors is an easy way of gaining more desktop space for tasks such as working in multiple applications simultaneously. The PX 2140 a good debut for Arbico, though, and we're looking forward to seeing more PCs from the company in the future.

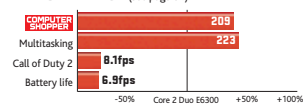
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in Windows
- ✓ Plenty of expansion options
- ✗ Better-value systems available

DESKTOP PC 2.66GHz Intel Pentium Dual Core E2140, 2GB RAM, 160GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon HD 3450, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, Windows Vista Home Premium, one-year return-to-base warranty
POWER CONSUMPTION 4W standby, 86W idle, 100W active
PART CODE PX 2140
DETAILS www.arbico.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 64)



Also consider...

MESH G92 Pulse Pro

★★★★★

£820 inc VAT

From www.meshcomputers.com

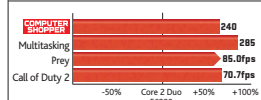
COMPUTER
SHOPPER
BEST BUY

The G92 Pulse Pro is a well-specified PC at a great price. Its 512MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GT graphics card performed very well in our demanding 3D tests. The G92 should be able to play the latest games at high detail settings, including upcoming DirectX 10 titles, for some time to come. The G92 can also be used for more serious work thanks to its fast Core 2 Duo processor and 2GB of RAM. Despite its power, it's a surprisingly quiet computer.

Mesh has substituted the original 22in GNR monitor for a 22in HannsG HI221DP. This is identical except for its higher 1,000:1 contrast ratio.



DESKTOP PC 3GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6850, 2GB RAM, 500GB hard disk, 512MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GT, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 22in widescreen LCD
DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com
FULL REVIEW Mar 2008



A second Nvidia graphics card can be added in SLI mode to boost 3D performance even further. Usefully, the 8800GT graphics card is a single slot rather than a double slot card, so it doesn't block off any adjacent PCI slots.

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium Dual Core E2140

MEMORY 1GB

HARD DISK 250GB

STORAGE 18X DVD writer

SOUND Integrated

SPEAKERS Stereo

GRAPHICS Integrated

MONITOR 19in widescreen LCD

EXTRAS memory card reader

CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network

SOFTWARE Windows Vista Home Premium

BASICS Keyboard, mouse

Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £400 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 If you are interested in games, upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the Radeon HD 3850 graphics processor will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today) it's worth upgrading to a more powerful card such as an Nvidia GeForce 8800GT.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of

PC activities. To hear the surround soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you.

If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you want to listen to music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 All but the cheapest PCs now come with widescreen monitors. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they feel more natural for working on panoramic photos or expansive spreadsheets.

Non-widescreen 17in LCDs are inexpensive, but not very exciting and quite small. A 19in widescreen LCD is now standard and has a resolution of 1,440x900 pixels. Larger 20in and 22in LCDs are available from around £170 and have a higher resolution of 1,680x1,050. This makes them better for those who want to work with complex applications.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, which can be annoying.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows Vista Home Premium is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may find a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for, so you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, and some can capture analogue video from a camcorder.



BYTE SIZE

MANFROTTO Modo Pocket

★★★

£25 inc VAT
From www.bogenimaging.co.uk



This mini 'tripod' has two feet that fold flat when not in use, allowing you to leave it permanently attached to your camera. It also has its own tripod thread, so you can attach a normal tripod without removing it.

You can adjust the legs to tilt the camera forwards, backwards, or sideways. This is great if there's a convenient level surface to hand, but other mini tripods, such as the Joby Gorillapod (see *What's New*, *Shopper* 235) are more flexible.

We also found that the pins that hold the hinges together kept falling out and, because it's 35mm deep, it will stick out from the front and back of many compact cameras, preventing them fitting in their case. At £25, the Modo Pocket is vastly overpriced.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.manfrotto.com

SAITEK Cyborg Laser Mouse

★★★★★

£30 inc VAT
From www.yoyotech.co.uk



New gaming mice are popping up all over the place, but Saitek's new wired Cyborg has the biggest wow factor of them all. It has a motorised rear section that adjusts to fit the size of your hand; adjustments are accompanied by a high-pitched whirring.

Saitek doesn't bother with an adjustable weight system, instead preferring adjustable tension on the scroll wheel, which is a more useful feature. There's a combined forward and back button on the left above your thumb and an additional thumb button on the extended base. A side-mounted four-way directional pad adds even more versatility.

Thanks to a 2,000dpi laser sensor, the Cyborg is precise in games. For £30 including VAT it's a real bargain.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.saitek.com